

THE RIGHTEOUS HOLDING ON HIS WAY

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A SERMON
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*“The righteous also shall hold on his way.”
Job 17:9.*

WE are thrice happy in having a goodly number of young beginners in our midst. Our springtide is cheered and beautified with many blossoms of hopeful converts. They have just begun to go on pilgrimage, and would be as happy as the birds of the air were it not that some of them are grievously afflicted with the fear that they shall not hold out to the end. This is one of their daily torments, that, after all, they shall be false to Christ; that the grace of God will fail them, or that they will fail to depend upon it; that, having begun well, they shall by-and-by be hindered, and shall not obey the truth of God. Now, perhaps a little plain conversation upon that subject may help to relieve them of their fears. Ignorance about divine truth is not bliss, and is not the friend to bliss—“that the soul without knowledge is not good.” The more we know concerning the doctrines of the gospel the better for our comfort, if by faith we are able to receive them. Many and many a doubt and fear now oppressing the people of God might be driven like chaff before the wind, if they were but better established in the truths of God relating to the points under their consideration. If they did but know more fully what God has revealed they would tremble less at what Satan suggests. It is, therefore, with the view of very simply talking about this matter of holding on the way of the heavenly pilgrimage, that I have taken this text this morning. May God the Holy Spirit bless it to us.

First, we intend to say, this morning, that the believer must hold on his way—it *is necessary* that he should do so; secondly, *it is exceedingly difficult* for him to do so—the perseverance of the saints is surrounded with enormous perils; yet, thirdly, *this perseverance is guaranteed by divine promise*; but, fourthly, *it is only guaranteed to certain persons* whose character is described in the text as being “the righteous.” These shall hold on their way.

I. First, then, it is absolutely essential to final salvation that we should be PARTICIPATORS IN FINAL PERSEVERANCE.

It has been said by some that he who once believes is therefore saved. I shall not deny the truth of that statement; but it is an unguarded mode of speech, and does not place the truth in the most Scriptural form. I would infinitely prefer to assert, that “He who truly believes, shall by divine grace continue to do so, and therefore shall be saved.” For it is not true that, supposing a man did once believe, and then became altogether an unbeliever he should be saved. If that were possible, that the believer should altogether fall from the grace of God, and become in all respects changed into an unbeliever, he would be damned; for on this point the word of God is very clear and decided; read the 24th verse of the 18th chapter of Ezekiel: “But when the righteous turns away from his righteousness, and commits iniquity, and does according to all the abominations that the wicked man does, shall he live? All his righteousness that he has done shall not be mentioned: in his trespass that he has trespassed, and in his sin that he has sinned, in them shall he die.” If it were possible for one who had entered upon the way of righteousness—truly entered upon it—to turn from it, utterly and totally, the consequences will be his final destruction, for Paul tells us, “It is impossible to renew them again unto repentance, seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame” (Heb 6:4-6). That is not the point we raise at all in the discussion of final perseverance. We do not admit the possibility of total apostasy in the case of the real believer in Jesus, but believe that he will hold on his way, and so be saved, but only saved by being enabled to hold on his way. We hold that in order to ultimate salvation, it is absolutely indispensable that everyone who is a believer should continue to be a believer; that he who is made by

grace to be holy, should continue to be holy; that he in whom the divine life is placed, should never lose that divine life. It is the keeping of that life which we believe ultimately ends in perfection and everlasting bliss.

1. The necessity of final perseverance is very clear, if you *look at the representation of the believer in the word of God*. He is frequently compared to a *traveler*; but no traveler reaches his journey's end merely by starting upon the road. If it should be a journey of seven weeks' length, if he shall sit down after journeying six weeks, he certainly will not reach the goal of his desires. It is necessary, if I would reach a certain city, that I should go every mile of the road; for one mile would not take me there; nor if the city were a 100 miles distant, would 99 miles bring me to its streets. I must journey all the length if I would reach the desired place. Frequently, in the New Testament, the Christian is compared to a *runner*—he runs in a race for a great prize; but it is not by merely starting, it is not by making a great spurt, it is not by distancing your rival for a little time, and then pulling up to take a breath, or sauntering to either side of the road, that you will win the race: we must never stop till we have passed the finish line; there must be no loitering throughout the whole of the Christian career, but onward, like the Roman charioteer, with glowing wheels, we must fly more and more rapidly till we actually obtain the crown. The Christian is sometimes, by the apostle Paul, who somewhat delights to quote from the ancient games, compared to the Grecian *wrestler* or boxer. But it is of little use for the champion to give the foe one blow or one fall—he must continue in the combat until his adversary is beaten. Our spiritual foes will not be vanquished until we enter where the conquerors receive their crowns, and therefore we must continue in a fighting attitude. It is in vain for us to talk of what we have done or are doing just now, he who continues to the end, the same shall be saved, and none but he.

The believer is also commonly compared to a *warrior*: he is engaged in a great battle, a holy war. Like Joshua, he has to drive out the Canaanites who have chariots of iron, before he can fully take possession of his inheritance; but it is not the winning of one battle that makes a man a conqueror; no, though he should devastate one province of his enemy's territories, yet, if he should be driven out by-and-by, he is beaten in the campaign, and it will yield him but small consolation to win a single battle, or even a dozen battles, if the campaign as a whole should end in his defeat. It is not commencing as though the whole world were to be cleared by one display of fire and sword, but continuing, going from strength to strength, from victory to victory, that makes the man the conqueror of his foe. The Christian is also called a *disciple* or *scholar*. But who does not know that the boy by going to school for a day or two does not therefore become wise? If the lad should give himself most diligently to his grammar for six months, yet he will never become a linguist unless he shall continue perseveringly in his classic studies. The great mathematicians of our times did not acquire their science in a single year; they pressed forward with aching brow; they burnt the midnight oil and tortured their brains; they were not satisfied to rest, for they could never have become masters of their art if they had lingered on the road. The believer is also called a *builder*, but you know of whom it was said, "This man began to build, but was not able to finish!" The digging out of the foundation is most important, and the building up of stone upon stone is to be carried on with diligence, but though the man should half finish the walls, or even complete them, yet if he does not roof in the structure, he becomes a laughing stock to every passer-by. A good beginning, it is said, is more than half, but a good ending is more than the whole. Better is the end of a thing than the beginning.

In every aspect of the Christian, continuance in faith and well-doing is essential to his safety; without a perpetual perseverance his profession is of no value. We will look at one more illustration, and see this most clearly. Take that simple metaphor of corn: of what value is the corn in the blade or even in the ear? What man can live upon the green blade or the half-formed ear? The joyous shout of the reaper is only evoked by the full corn in the ear; and you, young believer, you, growing Christian, must press forward and ripen into the perfection of your Christian manhood, for it is only then that the shout of "Hallelujah," and "glory to God," shall be fully heard. Take the Christian in any way in which God describes him, and he is one in whose ear is whispered the words, "Forward! Onward!" He is not one who can say, "I have attained." In a certain sense it is true he is saved, but as to his ultimate salvation, his

perfection before the throne of God can only be worked in him by the continual, sustained, and abiding work of the Holy Spirit.

2. But the fact that final perseverance is absolutely necessary is also clear, if you for a moment *take into consideration the nature of the case, and suppose that the man did not persevere*. Imagine a man who started with sincere simple faith in Christ, and with a new heart, and a right spirit; imagine him to have gone back to the world—can you suppose that he will enter heaven? He has deserted good for evil; he has shut his eyes to the light of God, and gone back to the darkness from which he professed to have escaped. He has, not ignorantly, but knowingly and deliberately quenched within his soul the spark of heavenly flame. He knew that the road led to hell, and he turned from it, he knew that the other path led to heaven, and he ran in it; but after a while he tired, he fainted, and he deliberately set his face hellward and gave up eternal life, pawning and throwing it away like Esau for a mess of pottage. Do you think it could be said otherwise of him than it was of that selfsame profane Esau, that he found no place for repentance, though he sought, sought it diligently and with tears? For this man, you see, has denied the Lord who bought him. He said he rested on Christ and depended on His precious blood; but he deliberately denies the faith, deliberately returns either to the beggarly elements of his own self-righteousness to rest under the law, or else to plunge again into open sin, and follow the devices of his flesh. What shall be said of this man, but that his last end shall be worse than the first? Enter heaven? How can it be? It is the place of the perfect, and this man, so far from being perfect, does not even press towards it. He has turned aside from perfection, he has given up everything which constituted him a partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light; he has, after being illuminated, gone back to darkness; after being quickened, has gone back to the tomb. What remains for him? Take the case into consideration, and you will see at once the impossibility of a non-persevering Christian entering into heaven.

3. Thirdly, I must strengthen that consideration by reminding you that *we have very express declarations in Scripture about professors and about believers too, if such could be, who do not persevere*. Do you not recollect the Savior's words, "No man, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God"? (Luke 9:62). Do you not remember that terrible sentence about the salt, "Salt is good: but if the salt has lost his savor, with what shall it be seasoned? It is neither fit for the land, nor yet for the dunghill; but men cast it out"? To the same effect is that fearful warning, "Remember Lot's wife!" she came out of the city of destruction, but she looked back, and became a pillar of salt as an everlasting warning to us against so much as the *thought* and look of apostasy. Then comes in that warning, where we are told concerning some, that it is impossible to renew them again unto repentance; and that word of Paul, "For the earth which drinks in the rain that comes oft upon it, and brings forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receives blessing from God: but that which bears thorns and briars is rejected, and is near unto cursing; whose end is to be burned;" and that of Peter, in his second epistle, and second chapter: "For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, the dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire" (20-22). Supposing a man, then, to have been washed in the blood of Jesus, to be quickened of the Spirit of God—supposing him to have gone back and to have entirely and totally lost all divine grace, he would be the hopeless man, beyond the reach of mercy, damned while yet living, a living hell even in the midst of this world. O beloved, how necessary, then, is it that the Christian should persevere and hold on even to the end!

4. I would have you observe the form of many of the promises, and as we have little time this morning, I ask you to read the second and third chapters of the Book of Revelation. There are some very choice promises made to the seven churches, and they are all put in this shape, "To him who *overcomes* will I give," and so on. Not to him who begins the fight; not to him who buckles on his harness; not to him who proclaims war; but "to him who overcomes will I give." The promises are reserved for such, and you know how, contrary to such promises, it is written, "If any man draws back, My soul shall have no pleasure in him."

Brothers and sisters, before I leave this subject this morning, there is something which I wish to press upon your minds: it is not very pleasant, but it is necessary for us to hear it. Let me remind you of some whom you yourselves have known who did appear to be among the most gracious and excellent of the earth, but are at this moment so far cast off as to have become entirely forgetful, even of the outward forms of religion, and have gone aside, by fearful sins, we fear, into perdition. That, mark you, has happened in some cases after many years of profession: the vessel has been wrecked at the harbor's mouth. The fire of religious excitement burned all day, at least, so they said (we do not search hearts), and it went out at night, just when it was most required, when the chamber, the chill, cold chamber, most needed the genial flame. Doubtless John was right when he said, "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us." But what a dreadful thing, not to persevere, and yet to have had the name of a Christian! When a man goes up a ladder, if he shall fall at the first step, that is bad; but if he shall fall when he has nearly reached the top, what a falling is there! God save us from it! If ever I prayed in my life, I think I did this morning when we were singing those words, "Let us not fall! Let us not fall!" Oh, to fall backward into perdition is the worst way of falling into hell! Christian, it is not with you that you *may* persevere or not—it is not an optional blessing—you *must* persevere, or else all you have ever known and felt will be good for nothing. You *must* hold on your way if you are ultimately to be saved.

Let me here say, and I leave the point, that I do not assert that a Christian must daily make progress in divine grace; he ought to do so, he should do so; but even if he should not do so, he will not be cast away for that. Neither do I assert that a Christian should always be conscious that he is in the way, for many of the best of God's saints are tormented with many doubts and fears. Nor do I say that every departure from the way of God is inevitably fatal—far from it, for many have departed for a season, and have been brought back and restored as penitent backsliders. Christian went down By-Path Meadow, and yet returned to the right road: that is a very different case from Demas, who forsook the way to dig in the silver mine, and perished in it. The general current of the soul, however, must be onward: the general current and tendency of the believer must be in the way of truth—both as to his heart and his life; and if it is not so, whatever boasts he may make about his faith, whatever experiences he may think he has had, if he does not hold out to the end, there is no salvation, no heaven, no bliss for him.

II. Secondly, it is possible that I may plunge thoughtful minds into deeper gloom still, while I remind you that while final perseverance is necessary, IT IS EXTREMELY DIFFICULT.

The way itself renders it so. The way to heaven is no smooth-shaven lawn, no well-rolled gravel path; it is a *rough* road, up-hill, down dale, across rivers, and over mountains. He who would get to heaven must have the spirit of Hannibal, who, when he led his troops over the Alps, said, "I will either find a way, or I will make one." You will need all the fortitude that divine grace, itself, can give you in order to reach, along such a road, the city of your desire.

Moreover, the road is *long*. It is a life-long road. To keep near to God by the space of a week is not the easiest thing conceivable. To deny one's passions, to overcome one's evil desires for the space of a month might be difficult, but this is for life; we shall not be able to lay down this charge till we lay down our bodies. Here we stand upon our watchtower, not by day alone, though the hot noontide might make us faint, but until the evening star arises, and onward through the dark night till the gleams of morning come; and so day after day, from the first childhood of our spiritual existence until we have matured into a ripe old age, it is watching, watching continually, and laboring and pressing forward. My brothers and sisters, I do not know how it is with some of you, but I feel this and must confess it, that in the early part of our Christian career there is a freshness and a novelty about everything which enables us to travel readily, but after awhile—there is no monotony, it is true, except in ourselves, but it begins to be heavy work to hold on in the ways of the Lord. It ought not to be so, but, alas, it is so! And we have to cry to the strong for strength that we may be renewed, or else the length of the way would wear us out.

Besides that, *the road is so contrary to fallen nature*. It is a way of faith. If it were a way of sight, one might walk in it easily, but it is a way of faith from the beginning to the end—"The just live by faith"—not a way of sensible comforts; not always a way of joyful experiences, but frequently a path of

deep tribulation, solemn heart-searching, bitterness, and of gall; a way outside the camp where none can sympathize with you; a way of scourging and of flagellation even from the hand of the great Father Himself, who hides Himself from us for a season. It is a way so contrary to flesh and blood, that he who holds out in it has received power from on High, and has the Holy Spirit within him. God Himself must dwell in a persevering Christian's heart. The Hebrew word for *hold on*, in the text is very expressive, it signifies to hold with strength, to hold toughly, to hold as with the teeth, resolving never to let go, but ever to go on. Beloved, we must hold on with tooth and nail: if we cannot run, we must walk; if we cannot walk, we must crawl on hands and knees up the hill; and if we cannot even do this, we must stand fast. Any Christians who have had experience of the divine life will say that from the way itself, it is no easy thing to continue in it.

Then, take into consideration, in the next place, as to our difficulties, our *flesh*—that heavy load which we have to take along this weary way. We have constitutional sins, any one of which, if left unwatched for a little season, would cause us to make shipwreck of our faith. Some of us are constitutionally idle; we would scarcely do anything unless the solemn obligation of duty compelled us. Others are constitutionally angry—quick tempered—and for them to become like little children (which they must do if they would be saved) is no easy task. Some, I know, are naturally desponding; their eyes have always a blue tinge, everything looks blue as they look abroad, and it is not so easy for them to trust in the Lord and do good, waiting patiently for the Lord's appearing. These natural infirmities and weaknesses of ours render it hard to drag our flesh along the road to heaven.

Besides this, who does not know that he bears a cage of unclean birds within himself? If my passions were all naturally on God's side, and would, without grace, run towards heaven, then there might be no difficulty in holding on the way; but, alas, the whole of our nature, when let alone, strains and tugs to go back to the land of Egypt! And sometimes it seems as if our baser passions would get the victory and compel us to wear once more the galling yoke, and to fret under the fierce bondage of the Pharaoh of hell. It must not be, it shall not be; but, O God, save me from that evil man, *myself*. "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Paul said so, and we have often had to say it; and, when living nearest to God, we have had to groan most over indwelling sin.

Besides our flesh, however, my brothers and sisters, we are all conscious of other foes in our way to heaven. For instance, there is the *world*. Can you mix with it, and obtain from it any quickening in the *spiritual* life? You are compelled to mix in it; your business calls you; common society demands of you that you should, in some measure mix with the world, for if you are not to speak to sinners, you must go out of the world altogether. But is it not hard work, after a week perhaps of toil with ungodly, blaspheming workmen, to come up to the house of God with the mind quite calm? To be in business with its worries, and its cares, and in the world with its customs, and its maxims, and still to be a child of God, is not easy! Ah, you must be a child of God indeed to remain true in such a world as this. Sometimes the world persecutes the Christian, and it is not always the easiest thing to fight with old Giant Grim, and keep the middle of the way and overcome him. Then there is that Vanity Fair, and he is a man indeed who can turn a deaf ear to all that crying, "Buy, buy, buy!" Worst of all there is Madam Bubble, with her sweet speech, and her words softer than butter, while inwardly they are drawn swords. You know how Mr. Standfast had to take to his knees before he could get rid of that old witch, when she offered him all sorts of delights, having caught him just in the frame for it, when he said he was as poor as an owlet, and weary and faint, *then* it was she offered him all that is fleshly and pleasant; only tears and prayers got him out of that difficulty. "The righteous shall hold on his way." O God, You have said it, but if You had not said so, we would have declared that in such a world as this it would be impossible for a Christian, through a life of trial, to maintain his integrity.

Then there is *the devil*: we put him last, for he is the most terrible foe. When he stretches his feet across the middle of the way, and swears that he will spill our souls, and we shall go no farther; when he brings the past up and tells us of our unfaithfulness; when he insinuates that there is no hereafter, that there is no heaven, but that our faith is all a foolish invention, and an old wives' fable; and then when he holds out present enjoyment and present gain, and tells us that if we do not get these we shall have nothing, and hisses out the accusation that we are hypocrites, and I know not what—ah, then, unless we carry

the true Jerusalem blade of the word of God, and have the grace of God to nerve our arm while we wield that sword of the Spirit, we shall not be “more than conquerors,” but die on the road! It is difficult for us to persevere for a while, but it is difficult in the extreme to do so to the end. To get to heaven is no child’s work. He who gets there will have to fight for every inch of the road; and when he gets there, oh, how he will clap his hands as he looks back upon the danger; how he will shout with them who triumph when he once finds himself emancipated from 10,000 dangers, and “with God eternally shut in.”

III. Thirdly, and, I trust, most comforting to our souls, the PERSEVERANCE OF THE CHRISTIAN IS GUARANTEED.

Would you prefer to hear one or two of the passages of Scripture read which *guarantee* the perseverance of believers? I have little time this morning, but here is one, the 32nd chapter of Jeremiah, 40th verse: “And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put My fear into their hearts, that they shall not depart from Me.” There is a double blessing—God will not depart from His people—His people shall not depart from Him. Thus doubly are they kept by divine grace. Our Savior’s words in the 6th chapter of John, at the 39th and 40th verses, are sweetly to the same import: “This is the Father’s will which has sent Me, that of all which He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. And this is the will of Him that sent Me, that everyone which sees the Son, and believes on Him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day.” You know that memorable passage a little farther on—the 10th chapter of John, 28th and 29th verses: “And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand. My Father, which gave them to Me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of My Father’s hand.” If more is needed, you might turn to that inexpressibly precious passage in the 8th chapter of Romans, where, towards the close, the apostle, having challenged heaven, and earth, and hell, to condemn the believer, says, “I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” The beloved apostle John, to quote from him once more, has told us in the 19th verse of the second chapter of his first epistle, “They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us. But you have unction from the Holy One, and you know all things.” These are just a handful of texts, and a mere handful from a vast mass. So clear is the doctrine of the final perseverance of the saints, that I venture to assert boldly that if the Bible does not teach it, it does not teach anything at all! If that is not a clear doctrine of revelation, then neither is the doctrine of the deity of Christ, nor indeed, any doctrine, and the Bible must be a mere wax nose, to be molded according to our will.

But, beloved, there are these considerations which make the perseverance of the Christian certain to us. *Unless the Christian shall persevere, the eternal purpose of God will be defeated*; for from the beginning God has chosen His people unto holiness, to be set apart for His service, to be purified by His grace that they may be presented at last without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing. If believers do not persevere, we have shown that they must perish as other apostates do; therefore, since the purpose of God for the sanctification and safety of His chosen cannot be frustrated, and the design of the Most High stands fast, we believe that the righteous shall hold on his way.

In addition to this, *the work of Jesus Christ would be of no use unless the blood-washed held on their way*. The Lord Jesus has redeemed His people from among men; but if, though they have been redeemed, they should *not persevere* unto the end, they would perish, and then it would follow that Christ shed His blood in vain; bought those whom He will never have; suffered for the sins of men who afterwards have to suffer for their own sins—which always seems to us to be a supposition filled with blasphemous impossibility, that Christ should be a surety for men’s sins, and be punished in their place, and yet those men should be punished for the sins which were laid upon their scapegoat. Such must be emphatically the case, brothers and sisters, unless those who are redeemed by blood persevere to the end.

Moreover, through the righteousness of Christ, believers are justified—they are declared to be no longer under the law; but if they do not persevere in holiness, they perish. How can he perish who is jus-

tified? How shall he be condemned who is not under the law, and consequently has no law which can condemn him? The thing becomes impossible! We are involved in a mesh of difficulties, a labyrinth from which we cannot escape, if we suppose it to be possible for a saint to finally fall from grace.

Moreover, all true believers are one with Christ. They are married to Him. Shall Christ lose His spouse? They are members of His body: they are declared to be parts of Himself; and shall Christ be dismembered? Shall He be a dislocated, disjointed, broken-up humanity? No, the church is His fullness—the fullness of Him that fills all in all. If Jesus saves not His church, He is not a perfect Christ—He is a maimed and wounded Savior. My brothers and sisters, the Lord Jesus Christ has gone to heaven as our representative—He represents every believer. Does He represent those who shall ultimately be cast into hell? Has He gone to prepare a place for believers? Yes! Then they shall have the place prepared for them, for otherwise the places will be prepared, but the people will not come. Has he not said that He is able to save to the uttermost those who come unto God by Him? How then shall it be possible for those who have come to God by Him to perish, seeing He always lives to make intercession for them? Paul uses an overwhelming argument which I cannot this morning open up in full, but it has a triple power about it. “If,” he said, “when we were enemies, we were reconciled unto God by the death of His Son; much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.” If when we were enemies, without a thought towards God, He reconciled us, much more will He save us now that we are His children. If we were reconciled, much more shall we be saved, which is by far the least difficult work of the two; and if the death of Christ sufficed to reconcile us, what shall not the *life* of the glorious, immortal Savior do? Surely if the death has done so much, the life shall do yet more, and it shall be true as it is written, “Because I live, you shall live also.”

Further, my beloved, as we have spoken of the Father and of the Son, there is *the Holy Spirit's work to be taken into consideration*. He *dwells* in us: shall He be expelled? It is written that we are the temples of the Holy Spirit: shall the temples of the Holy Spirit become like the temples of Jove or of Saturn? Shall they be given up to the moles and the bats, degraded and defiled? God forbid! He who dwells there will drive out the foe and maintain a shrine for Himself in purity. The Holy Spirit has begun to sanctify us: will He begin and not conclude? Shall the Holy Spirit be defeated by the devil and the flesh? Shall the banner of the devil be hung in Satan's hall because he has overcome the elect? Beloved, God gave the victory to Satan for a moment in the Garden of Eden, but with the determination to win it from him; and He has bound captivity captive, and there shall be none of the spoils of the elect left in the hands of the enemy. God shall be conqueror all through the campaign; and at the last the Spirit shall not be defeated in a single heart where He came to dwell. Let us rejoice, then, that when we consider the work of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, it does seem impossible that the righteous should be lost. They must, therefore, hold on their way. Beloved, let us fall back upon this truth of God in our times of worst discouragement; and if any say, “This is not a practical truth, but calculated to lull us into sleep,” let us prove, by our activity, that they err, not knowing the truth of God. I can never conceive that it dispirits the soldier, when he is fighting, to tell him that he will win the victory! This is what Cromwell's iron-sides said when they saw the great general riding along the ranks, “‘Tis he!” they said, “‘tis he!” They felt the victory was sure where Cromwell was, and like thunderbolts they dashed upon their enemies, until as thin clouds before the tempest the enemy flew apace. The certainty of victory gives strength to the arm that wields the sword. To say to the Christian you shall persevere till you get to the journey's end—will that make him sit down on the next mile-stone? No; he will climb the mountain, wiping the sweat from his brow; and as he looks upon the plain, he will descend with surer and more cautious footsteps, because he knows he shall reach the journey's end. God will speed the ship over the waves into the desired haven; will the conviction of that on the part of the captain make him neglect the vessel? Yes, if he is a fool; but if he is a man in his wits, the very certainty that he shall cross the deep will only strengthen him in time of storm to do what he would not have dreamt of doing if he had been afraid the vessel would be cast away. Brothers and sisters, let this doctrine impel us to a holy ardency of watchfulness, and may the Lord bless us and enable us to persevere to the end.

IV. Lastly, PERSEVERANCE IS GUARANTEED, BUT NOT TO EVERYBODY.

There are some here who are not believers in Christ. A text rose up last night out of the Bible and struck me very painfully. I was afraid as I read it that some of you would persevere to the end and would go to hell, for I read these words, “He that is filthy, let him be filthy still,” and I wondered whether Christ would say that of some of you. I am afraid for you; you have been warned; you have heard the gospel; you have been entreated to wash in the fountain, and you will not come. You have put off many and many a stroke of conscience, and said, “Go your way; when I have a more convenient season I will send for you.” Now, mind, mind lest Christ should say, “Let him alone; he is unjust, let him be unjust still; he is prayerless, let him be prayerless still; he never feels the word, let him be unfeeling still; he is a tearless, Christless soul, he shall be so forever.” God forbid it! Now, do not any of you who are in that case go home and talk about the comfortable doctrine I have preached; it is nothing to you, you are like the poor shivering outcast in the street who sees Christmas festivities through the window, in which he has no share. Go home, and God break your heart over this; may God cause you to mourn that there is no gracious perseverance for you, because you have no grace to persevere in; and that if you persevere in the road you are now in, it will only be to keep to the road of destruction that will at last end in the dreadful terminus of hell-fire.

There are, on the other hand, some of you who have made a profession of faith; it may be these hands baptized you in the name of the Lord Jesus, in this pool beneath. Ah, well, Christ has not said that you shall *all* persevere. Perhaps you made a profession merely to please parents, or friends, or to do what seemed to be a custom with others; perhaps you never had a deep sense of sin; perhaps you never did rest in Christ: I pray God that you may not persevere, but may repent and begin anew. Do not say, “Peace, peace,” where there is no peace. Come as a poor sinner to Christ, and you will never be cast away; but if you merely make a profession of a notional religion that you have in your head, and not in your heart, it will be all ill with you at the last. You will be like the plant which had not much earth; when the sun arose, the root was scorched and the plant withered away. May God give you grace—may you be deeply rooted with divine grace in your heart.

But it is to you who have faith in God—it is to you who this final perseverance is promised, and I ask you to come this morning and take it. “How,” you say, “shall I take it?” Why, come to Jesus just as you did when you first came. That is the true final perseverance—to always come to Christ, having nothing in self, but having all in Him. I hope you and I feel, this morning, that the sweet verse of Toplady still fits our case—

*“Nothing in my hands I bring—
Simply to Your cross I cling;
Naked, come to You for dress;
Helpless, look to You for grace;
Foul, I to the fountain fly—
Wash me, Savior, or I die.”*

Keep to that; never get an inch beyond that. Stand at the foot of the cross and view the sin-atonement blood; rest there living, rest there dying, and then when your spirit mounts to heaven, may your last song be of being washed in Jesus’ blood; and in heaven may it be said of you as of your fellow sinners, “They have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” The Lord bless you and keep you, and cause His face to shine upon you, and give you peace. Amen and Amen!

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—PSALM 16:40.

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